cannot be answered categorically: Was it of his own free will that Bonaparte accepted the command of the Egyptian expedition, or did the directors force it on him? What was the ultimate design of the great schemer if the imminent war broke out while the best French troops were in Africa?

In considering the probabilities as to both these queries, it appears as if Bonaparte had convinced himself that the open assumption of authority was for the moment impossible. He could not be a director: candidates for that office must be forty years old. He dared not take Barras's suggestion and seize the dictatorship, even temporarily, because the Jacobin members of the Directory made it plain, in certain very disorderly sessions of that body, that they would not tolerate such a plan and were strong enough to thwart it. These scenes, which were not kept secret, and were described in the coffee-houses, led the Paris populace to suspect Bonaparte. They were enjoying a temporary repose which it would have been dangerous at the moment for any aspirant to disturb. It must have seemed plain that a change in the constitution was essential to anything like the speedy realization of his personal ambition, which had already taken definite form. As early as September nineteenth, 1797, Bonaparte wrote Talleyrand a letter containing what he called his complete code of politics. His sphinx-like demeanor and the mysterious allusions already quoted from the festival speech, taken in connection with that outline, confirm the notion that Talleyrand, Barras, and Sieyes were preparing for a new constitution, which should be ready for use when the spring elections had increased the number of royalist delegates, as they were sure to do, and had thus produced a clash between the executive and the legislature.

The "complete code of politics" expresses the same